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ABSTRACT

The Nurses Educational Collaborative (NEC) is a 4-year-old collaborative effort linking the Division of Continuing Education at Greenfield Community College (GCC) with the Division of Health Education and Training at Franklin Medical Center (Greenfield, Massachusetts). The program's goal is to provide accessible, affordable, continuing education courses for both registered and licensed practical nurses at times and locations convenient for working nurses. Course offerings are recommended by an advisory council of 25 nurses and nurse administrators who conduct needs assessments and meet twice yearly to develop their recommendations. The staff of the NEC includes five part-time administrative workers, two part-time clerical workers, and part-time teachers hired as needed. GCC handles the administrative functions and the Franklin Medical Center provides information and assistance on more substantive matters. All money supporting NEC comes from student tuition, and neither the Medical Center nor GCC charges NEC for the time their staffs spend working for the organization. The NEC offers approximately 25 courses during each academic semester and 12 courses during the summer, with classes meeting on campus, at the Medical Center, and other places throughout the community. Although the advisory council is charged with formally evaluating the program, to date only informal feedback has been obtained. This feedback shows that NEC offers a high quality product at a low price. (LAL)

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The Nurses Educational Collaborative is a highly successful four-year-old collaborative linking the Division of Continuing Education at Greenfield Community College with the Division of Health Education and Training at Franklin Medical Center, both located in Greenfield, Massachusetts. The program's goal is to provide accessible, affordable continuing education courses for both registered and licensed practical nurses.

Participation in continuing education nursing courses has been required for nursing license renewal in the state of Massachusetts since 1978, but there were historically very few continuing education programs for nurses in the Greenfield area. In 1980, the Greenfield Community College Department of Continuing Education and the Franklin Medical Center Health Education and Training Department began investigating the feasibility of offering high quality nursing programs in the area.

GCC will celebrate its twenty-fifth anniversary in 1987, and is the only community college in the state that was established through community request. Greenfield, located in northwestern Massachusetts, is a town of 20,000 people, and the largest of the 26 towns that comprise Franklin County. Greenfield is also more than an hour's drive from any sizeable city where similar courses would be available. Pittsfield and Springfield are more than a three-hour drive both ways; Boston is four hours round trip.

From the beginning, NEC's goals were to provide high quality continuing education programs at times and locations that were convenient for working nurses, as well as to provide a balance of offerings to meet the varied professional needs of nurses who work in a vairety of practice settings and who have an interest in a variety of clinical fields.

According to the American Nurses Association (ANA), Continuing Education in nursing "consists of planned learning experiences beyond a basic nursing educational program. These experiences are designed to promote the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes for the enhancement of nursing practice, thus improving health care to the public." The NEC subscribes to that definition, and strives to provide courses that keep nurses up to date on current medical practice.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The Nurses Educational Collaborative is Greenfield Community College and Franklin Medical Center. The needs assessment for continuing education programs is conducted by an Advisory Council

made up of 25 nurses and nurse administrators, each of whom represents a specific area of nursing practice in Franklin County. The areas of practice identified are: acute care, extended care, community health, industrial health, school nurses, office nurses, nurse practitioners, nursing educators, private duty nurses and inactive nurses. Membership in the Advisory Council is voluntary, but appointments are controlled by the NEC staff in the interest of diversity and balance.

The Advisory Council meets twice yearly to recommend course content to the NEC staff. The actual program planning is done by the Collaborative staff.

Occasionally NEC will cooperate with other health care providers to offer continuing education programs at their location, listing them as co-sponsor at no cost to them.

All NEC programs are advertised through the Greenfield Community College Continuing Education catalogue and a special NEC brochure. Registration takes place through Greenfield Community College, which also keeps a permanent record of courses and credits for individuals.

STAFF

NEC staff includes five part time administrative workers, two part-time clerical workers and part-time teachers hired as needed. Greenfield Community College handles the administrative work and Franklin Medical Center provides information and assistance on more substantive matters. GCC pays the NEC

coordinator, makes all of the logistical arrangements and keeps the academic records.

Franklin Medical Center also serves as "quality control" on the program, suggesting new program directions, and providing highly valued assistance in enlisting instructors who would respond far less favorably to an educational institution than to a medical one.

The informal management structure serves NEC well. Staff members feel free to swap tasks and revise decisions along the way. Innovative ideas and/or unprecedented procedures can be enacted quickly and without the burden of paperwork. For example, when it made better sense to conduct a course in respiratory disease at FMC's laboratory rather than in a GCC classroom, it was accomplished with two phone calls.

BUDGET

NEC revenues totaled $20,856.50 from Summer, 1985 through Spring 1986. Operating expenses, including instructional fees, catalogue and brochure printing and advertising totaled $12,108,14, providing a net income of $8,748.36.

All money supporting NEC comes from tuition, and no other funds come from the state or either of the two cooperating institutions. The net income remains in the GCC accounts. GCC pays for the time of staff members, in addition to the director's $250 salary. GCC also pays for secretarial time, teaching and

publicity materials, the physical facilities (whether at GCC or elsewhere), and instructors' salaries.

Neither the Franklin Medical Center nor GCC charge NEC for the time their staff spend working for NEC, and this is an important part of the collaborative understanding.

Students are charged a $5 registration fee per course, and $5 per contact hour. Courses with a clinical component are more expensive.

PROGRAM OPERATION

Meeting rooms at Greenfield Community College and at the Franklin Medical Center and throughout the community are used for the classes. The NEC offers approximately 25 courses each academic semester, and twelve courses during the summer months. NEC also performs all services related to these offerings, including scheduling arrangements, clerical work involved in hiring instructors, providing the physical space, and supplying course materials when necessary.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The Advisory Council is charged with the task of formally evaluating the program, although that has not happened yet. Plans for an evaluation are now in progress.

Less formal, though highly regarded feedback--mostly in relation to course content--has enabled the staff to gain some sense of participants' satisfaction. Feedback sheets are given to students at the end of each course, members of the Advisory

Council report verbally what their constituents think of the courses, and NEC staff members visit classrooms periodically for quality control purposes.

The Division of Contiuing Education keeps a check on NEC's cost-effectiveness, which, not incidentally, is quite substantial.

NEC enjoys unqualified success. It is cost effective and offers a high quality product at a price far lower than what is offered at other institutions who provide such a program. NEC, created to spare nurses in this rural region the difficulty of long travel time, now enrolls students who drive long distances into Greenfield to take NEC classes.

NEC staff work together exceedingly well and attribute much of the credit for their high rate of productivity and the high quality of the program to the formal management structure and the personal flexibility of individual staff members. Despite the fact that three of the four NEC staff positions have turned over at least once since its inception, the NEC staff has always enjoyed harmony.

It must also be noted that both FMC and GCC promote collaboration. Other collaboratives exist and are encouraged in both institutions. NEC was approved on all levels at both GCC and FMC when it was conceived and it continues to receive that support. GCC and FMC believe in the value of interdependency among institutions, are committed to community development, and

are willing to give the time and money to promote both in the interest of quality service.

For more information on the Nurses Educational Collaborative, contact Patricia Leuchtman, Division of Continuing Education, Greenfield Community College, Greenfield, Massachusetts, 01301. Telephone (413) 774-3131.

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